

TESTIMONY ON SB 2147
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
January 19, 2021
By: Stanley Schauer, Director, Office of Assessment
701-328-2224
North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

Chairman Schaible and Members of the Committee:

My name is Stanley Schauer, Director in the Office of Assessment with the Department of Public Instruction. I am here on behalf of the department to speak in favor of SB 2147. The problem that this bill proposes to help alleviate comes from the field and the situations that can be alleviated by this bill are common among many K12 schools. The idea presented is not set out to have an effect on a majority of students, rather a minority of students who could be deemed at-risk or on a trajectory to be at-risk, due to credit deficiency.

SB 2147 proposes two simple changes that have the same effect. Essentially, the four core subject areas could be satisfied via the corresponding subject area from the same battery of assessments used to earn a GED. For example, if a student was in their senior year of high school and had only earned 1 math credit, the math GED test could be used in a competency-based manner to satisfy the math graduation requirements/credits. All remaining requirements and credits for graduation are still required. This could also be done, at the discretion of the school board and school, for the other core subjects (English language arts, Science, Social Studies).

The overall objective is fairly simple, even though how the bill was written seemed to cause some slight confusion, in that we are trying to create another tool/program/pathway that schools can utilize to keep students from dropping out of K12 education and to remain on a path of success. We are also aligning our efforts to support the direction of recognizing more competency and proficiency-based measurements in North Dakota K12 education. The bill is not intended for any student to choose to opt into or to fast track through high school, instead it is intended to enable schools to build a program or pathway, with eligibility requirements, to better serve students who might otherwise dropout. The bill was written with sort of an open concept and done so to respect the decision making and program building capacity of our local school boards, districts, and school leaders. The decision of how to use this tool, I feel, should be with those nearest to the problem. Each of our schools are unique, as are the students they serve and the situations they experience.

NDDPI will be prepared to give examples, guidance, and technical assistance if and when schools look to activate this tool. A benefit to using an assessment like the GED is the amount of data we have been able to collect and correlations that can be made, from the scale scores, between it and other standardized assessments that are commonly used, such as the ACT. The Regional Adult Learning Centers (ALCs) and Correctional Education folks would also be willing to provide assistance, share best practices, as well as recommend tried and tested curriculum. For example, a

common practice that ND ALCs have adopted is the use of GED Ready exams and setting the bar a little higher (150 in lieu of 145) before attempting an official test. An educator can gain helpful insight with a prediction on how well a student would perform on an Official exam, as well as get very specific feedback on sections of a subject that need to be improved upon. In math, the areas are broken down into sections such as algebra or geometry. Taking it a step further, you can select commonly used print and electronic based curriculum and get ranges of page numbers in which these skills are taught or introduced. This provides targeted feedback to drive instructional decisions. As I have shared in other testimony with this committee, ND has a pass rate, a metric that is deemed key by GED Testing Service, that is typically top three in the nation. Side note, we have recently added some GED data to ND Insights and this metric, year over year, can be seen with a comparison to the national pass rate.

I have personally had conversations, over the past couple years, with school leaders about options for students who are way behind in credits. In a lot of these conversations, credit recovery or seat time options would not have helped. So, we have students who do not want to drop out of K12, but are left with no other viable option. Current law does not allow for funding to be provided to work towards a GED, it is clear, from my understanding, in that it says high school diploma. Even if some of these students stayed in school until they were legally unable, they still

might not catch up. Also, for some students, catching up means falling behind in other areas in which credit is required for graduation. These are the examples and situations that spurned this concept. The hope lies in allowing students, who would typically drop out due to credit trajectory, to stay enrolled in school, have a means to more quickly catch up in the core areas, and earn a high school diploma. Looking full circle, if students drops out of high school and still wants to pursue an education, the GED test is what would be used. It is the only test that ND uses for high school equivalency.

In discussions with education stakeholders and leaders about this bill, not knowing exactly what the bill set out to do was a trend. I understand this, as the amendments are rather open-ended. After a brief explanation, the folks I spoke with understood its purpose and shared the idea that it could be a helpful way to guide students to success. School boards, per the amendments, are the gatekeepers of this program being implemented or not implemented, as well as how its implemented. As Senator Oban mentioned, nothing in this bill creates a mandate. If a school or school board does not think this is a good idea or does not believe they have students who are or might be in this situation, it can simply not be utilized.

I have also been told that some might bring up the rigor of the GED test in opposition to this bill. I can provide data, test question examples, and more rebuttal than anyone would be interested in hearing when it comes to the rigor of the

assessment. Furthermore, and a fun experiment used previously with a past Education Committee, a chance to take a GED official exam, to get a feel or sense for the said rigor. In 2014, the GED test was completely gutted and rebuilt. It was built with College and Career Readiness Standards in mind and the cut score was initially set at 150. After the ability to live test individuals and during a common process in assessment development called norming, or standard setting, it was revealed a majority of students who had earned a high school diploma were failing the GED exam. This caused GED Testing Service to lower the cut score, to ensure the assessment itself was not beyond what a typical high school graduate could pass. Not every student who achieves a passing score on a GED is college ready and I would also say not every student who earns a high school diploma is college ready either. This is clearly evidenced by the standardized assessments required upon entering post-secondary.

GED Testing Service has developed leveled scores, for example a score of 165 is called College Ready and in ND, students who achieve a 165 in math trend at about 20.5 on the ACT and a 165 in Reading on the GED trends at exactly the same score as ACT college ready, a 22. In other states, the university systems have adopted those GED cut scores. For example, a student achieving a 165 is waived from remedial classes and from the requirement to take another standardized assessment upon entrance. I share this because I feel strongly that the GED is a useful tool in

ND and that it can be used beyond its typical purpose and that talks of lacking rigor, especially without data presented, are most likely invalid.

Moving past rigor, I think anyone involved with education knows that our students are best served in our schools and this bill's main objective is to decrease the students who dropout of school. It does not solve all dropout issues, but I feel it gives our schools another tool in combating dropout percentages and is aligned to the ability our students need to demonstrate competency and proficiency in subject matter rather than simply complete seat time. This bill provides another opportunity for our schools to allow students the opportunity to demonstrate competency in core subject areas

In closing, I just want to again mention that the sole purpose of this bill is to provide schools a tool to serve students who are at-risk or on a path to becoming at-risk. It is not intended to make graduation easier; it is intended to allow a student to showcase a set of knowledge and skills in an alternative way and obtain the credits necessary in a competency-based manner. We are most likely not talking about thousands of students a year. I would estimate it in the hundreds, but even if it is lower and we can help those who find themselves without an option, I feel it is worth the effort.

Chairman Schaible and Members of the Committee that concludes my prepared testimony and I will stand for any questions that you may have.